1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	BILL LOCKYER Attorney General of the State of California LOUIS VERDUGO, JR. Senior Assistant Attorney General ANGELA SIERRA, State Bar No. 126374 Supervising Deputy Attorney General MICHAEL F. SWEENEY, State Bar No. 137462 Deputy Attorney General 300 South Spring Street, Suite 13000 Los Angeles, CA 90013 Telephone: Fax: Attorneys for Petitioner/Plaintiff The People of the State of California, Ex rel. Bill Lockyer, Attorney General of the State of California		
10	IN THE SUPERIOR COURT		
11	OF THE COUNTY OF KERN		
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13 14	THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, EX REL. BILL LOCKYER, Attorney General of the State of California,	CASE NO. PETITION FOR WRIT OF	
15	Petitioner/Plaintiff,	MANDATE (Code Civ. Proc., § 1085) AND COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF	
16	v.	(42 U.S.C. § 12131 et seq.)	
17 18	COUNTY OF KERN; ANN BARNETT, in her Official Capacity as County Clerk and Registrar of Voters of the County of Kern, and DOES 1 through		
19	10, inclusive,		
20	Respondents/Defendants.		
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22	INTRODUCTION		
23	The right to vote is fundamental in American society. This right inures to the benefit		
24	of all citizens regardless of their visual acuity, walking ability, ability to climb stairs, ascend		
25	steep inclines, or maneuver doors and latches. Voters with disabilities are entitled to participate		
26	in the American tradition of voting at public polling sites on an equal basis with voters who do		
27	not have disabilities and in an integrated setting, along with their friends, neighbors, and		
28	colleagues. The right to vote should not depend on the ability of individuals to surmount		
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	Petition for Writ of Mandate and Complaint for Injunctive Relief		

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27 28 physical obstacles which violate state and federal accessibility laws.

Recognizing the irreparable harm caused by inaccessible polling sites, Bill Lockyer, the Attorney General of the State of California, with the assistance of the Independent Living Centers (ILC), conducted informal surveys during the March 2 and November 2, 2002 statewide elections to determine if California counties were meeting their obligation to ensure that their polling sites are accessible to individuals with disabilities as required by state and federal law. The survey results identified the County of Kern as a jurisdiction whose polling sites possibly had a significant number of disability access law violations. The results for Kern County from the surveys conducted during the March 2 and November 2, 2002 elections were provided to the County in September 2002 and October 2003, respectively.

The Attorney General concluded that a further review of Kern County's polling sites was warranted. Accordingly, the Attorney General conducted an investigation of Kern County's polling sites during the March 2 and November 2, 2004 statewide elections. The results of that investigation confirmed that the County of Kern is selecting polling sites that have an unacceptable large number of access barriers that violate state and federal law and would make access difficult and, in some instances, impossible for voters with physical disabilities. The People of the State of California ex rel. Bill Lockyer, Attorney General of the State of California thus bring this action against the County of Kern and Ann Barnett, in her official capacity as County Clerk and Registrar of Voters of the County of Kern, to compel them to take all necessary steps to bring Kern County's polling sites into compliance with state and federal disability access laws.

ALLEGATIONS

Petitioner/Plaintiff, the People of the State of California, ex rel. Bill Lockyer, Attorney General of the State of California (hereinafter "Attorney General," "People" and/or "Petitioner"), allege the following:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

Elections Code section 12280 requires elections officials to undertake necessary measures in the selection of polling places to ensure that polling places meet the guidelines

promulgated by the California Secretary of State for accessibility by individuals with physical disabilities.

2. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"), United States Code, title 42, section 12131 et seq., which became effective January 26, 1992, and the regulations promulgated thereunder also require elections officials to ensure that the polling sites they designate be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities on election day.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 3. This Court has jurisdiction over causes of action for mandamus relief pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure section 1085 alleging the failure to carry out mandatory statutory responsibilities pursuant to Elections Code 12280. This court also has concurrent jurisdiction with the federal courts over causes of action alleging violations of the ADA.
- 4. Venue is proper in this court because the unlawful acts complained of in this Petition/Complaint occurred within the County of Kern.

PARTIES

- 5. Petitioner Bill Lockyer is the duly elected Attorney General of the State of California. Under the California Constitution, Article V, section 13, the Attorney General has the duty to see that the State's laws are uniformly and adequately enforced for the protection of public rights and interests. The Attorney General also possesses *parens patriae* standing to commence legal actions for violations of any federal law concerning the health and welfare of the State's citizens, including violations of the ADA.
- 6. The Attorney General brings this action to protect the rights of individuals who have visual and/or mobility impairments, including those that use a wheelchair, walking aid, and are substantially limited in one or more of the major life activities, such as walking, or have an anatomical, physiological, or neurological condition that prevents the exercise of normal bodily function. These individuals have a qualified disability as that term is defined by applicable law.
- 7. The Attorney General invokes his *parens patriae* standing because Respondents/
 Defendants' failure to ensure that Kern County's polling sites are accessible affects a large
 number of California residents. According to the most recent U.S. Census data, as of 2004, Kern

County's population was estimated to be 734,846 and an estimated 22.5% of Kern County's population age five or older are individuals with disabilities. Absent Attorney General action, many of these individuals who are eligible to vote will be deterred from exercising or unable to exercise their fundamental right to vote on an equal basis with individuals without disabilities and will suffer irreparable harm.

- 8. The Attorney General has an interest in the health and well being of the People of the State of California. An important component of that well being is the ability of its citizens to exercise the fundamental right to vote in an integrated setting. Kern County employs approximately 146 polling sites during statewide elections. A voter with a disability who does not discover that his or her polling site is inaccessible until election day would be unable to obtain legal relief before the polls closed and his or her right to vote in that election would be irretrievably lost or compromised.
- 9. The Attorney General also has a substantial sovereign interest in assuring that all citizens are free to exercise their fundamental right to vote and to do so in an integrated setting without discrimination on the basis of their disability. Such discrimination threatens the rights and privileges of California's citizens, and jeopardizes the integrity of the democratic process.
- 10. Respondent/Defendant County of Kern ("County" and/or "Kern") is a public entity incorporated under the laws of the State of California under the California Constitution, Article XI, section 1. The County operating through its County Elections Department is responsible for conducting elections under the California Elections Code. This responsibility includes designating polling site locations to enable voters to cast their ballots on election day. The County is responsible for ensuring, among other access requirements, that every polling site has accessible parking, exterior routes of travel to the entrance, entrances, and interior access.
- 11. Respondent/Defendant Ann Barnett ("Barnett") is the County Clerk and Registrar of Voters for the County of Kern. Barnett is the official responsible for designating polling sites in Kern County and ensuring that these sites meet state and federal accessibility laws, including the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines, on election day.

1	2.	Exterior Routes of Travel:	
2		• Accessible routes including ramps to travel to the entrance	
3		Adequate path widths to accommodate wheelchairs	
4		• Slip resistant surfaces	
5		• Obstructions	
6		• Ramp adequacy: width, level landings, handrails, and guardrails	
7		• Entrance accessability	
8		Adequate signage for disabled entrances	
9	3.	Interior of Polling Site:	
10		Adequate doorway clearances	
11		Adequate doorway thresholds	
12		• Door operation	
13		Accessible exit doors	
14		Accessible panic hardware for doors	
15		Adequate clearance on each side of a doorway	
16		Accessible hallways and corridors	
17		• Interior obstructions	
18		Accessible voting booths	
19		Adequate voting privacy	
20		Adequate lighting	
21		Adequate ramps	
22		• Adequate flooring: Stable, slip resistant	
23		• If applicable, adequacy of any elevators	
24		• If applicable, accessability of the restrooms	
25		Responsiveness of poll workers to accommodation requests	
26	18. The surveys assessed those violations which were most easily observable		
27	and potentially most significant in hampering or precluding access to the polling sites by voters		
28	with disabilities. For instance, since January 1992, in order for a polling site to be readily		

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accessible to voters with disabilities in compliance with the ADA, the following accessibility conditions, among others, set forth in the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) codified at 28 C.F.R. Pt. 36, App A, must be present at polling sites on election day: if off-street parking is provided at the polling site, at least one disabled parking space with an eight-foot aisle to allow for the loading and unloading of a passenger with a wheelchair must be provided; there must be at least one accessible route from the parking area to the entrance that is not interrupted by unramped steps or abrupt level changes greater than half an inch; ramps must be equipped with level landings, handrails, edge protections and a non-slip surface and the slope must not exceed 8.3%; doorways must be at least 32-inches wide with the door open at 90 degrees; door thresholds must be no greater than a half-inch in height; if the main entrance is not accessible, the accessible alternative entrance must be clearly marked; and, any obstructions that overhang a pedestrian's way must be sufficiently high so that a person with a visual impairment would not bump into them. The above-referenced accessibility requirements are also required by the current Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines that were in effect during the November 2004 election. A number of these requirements were also included in the Secretary of State's former accessibility guidelines that were in effect during the March 2, 2004 general election.

- 19. During the March 2, 2004 statewide election, Petitioner surveyed 115 of the 146 polling sites in Kern County. The survey results revealed that of the sites surveyed, approximately 75% had one serious physical barrier in violation of the ADAAG's requirements governing parking, exterior route of travel and interior of the site that would make it difficult for voters with disabilities to exercise their right to vote at the sites, with each of those sites averaging 3.5 ADAAG violations, per site. A number of these violations also violated the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines that were in effect during that election. Further, at least five of the sites surveyed were completely inaccessible to voters with disabilities in violation of both the ADAAG and the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines because steps or other significant physical barriers were present.
- 20. Of the Kern County sites surveyed during the March 2, 2004 election, the survey results revealed that approximately 45% of the 105 sites that provided on-site parking had at

least one violation of the ADAAG that would make voting for individuals with disabilities who drove to the polling site difficult, if not impossible.

- 21. The survey results further showed that approximately 33% of the Kern County polling sites surveyed during the March 2, 2004 election had sections of the exterior path of travel to the entrance of the polling site that failed to comply with the ADAAG. The ADAAG violations included unramped stairs or abrupt level changes, pathways or ramps that were excessively steep, ramps without the required handrails, lack of proper signage to direct voters to accessible paths of travel and overhangs that a person with visual impairments could hit. A number of these architectural barriers and conditions also violated the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines in effect during the March 2, 2004 election.
- 22. Approximately 36% of the Kern County polling sites surveyed during the March 2, 2004 election had at least one violation of the ADAAG at the entrance or along the path of travel inside the voting site. The violations included doorways or hallways that were insufficiently wide, door thresholds that were excessively high, doorways that did not provide appropriate maneuvering space, and/or door hardware that was inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. A number of these barriers also violated the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines.
- 23. Approximately 47% percent of the polling sites surveyed in Kern County during the March 2, 2004 election that had restrooms available to the public had one or more violations of the ADAAG that would make usage of the restrooms difficult, if not impossible, for voters with disabilities.
- 24. The results from the Petitioner's survey of Kern County's polling sites during the March 2004 general election were provided to the County of Kern on or about May, 2004.
- 25. During the November 2, 2004 election, Petitioner surveyed 83 of the approximate 146 polling sites in Kern County. The survey results reflected that a vast majority of the polling sites had multiple violations of state and federal disability laws that would make it difficult for voters with disabilities to participate in voting activities at those sites. Specifically, at least one violation of the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines and the ADAAG was present at approximately 94% of all polling sites surveyed, with each of those sites averaging

27. At several polling sites, the above-described accessibility violations are so serious that

approximately 5.5 violations per site. Further, as was the case during the March 2, 2004 election, there were again several polling sites in Kern County that were totally inaccessible to persons with disabilities, since steps or other significant barriers were present at the sites that would completely exclude those persons from voting.

- 26. Examples of violations of the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines and the ADAAG at polling sites in Kern County during the November 2, 2004 election demonstrated by the survey results include the following:
- a. Of the total of 79 voting sites that had on-site parking spaces for voters, approximately 44% had at least one violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines that would make voting for persons with disabilities who drove to the site difficult, if not impossible. The violations found included parking spaces or access aisles that were too narrow, inadequate location proximity to the voting entrance or a lack of appropriate signs designating the accessible spaces.
- b. Approximately 35% of Kern County's polling sites surveyed had violations of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines along the exterior route of travel to the voting area. The barriers observed included unramped steps or abrupt changes in level, paths of travel that were excessively steep, ramps that were not wide enough, and overhangs that a person with visual impairments could run into.
- c. Approximately 41% of the sites surveyed had at least one violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines at the entrance or along the path of travel inside the voting area. The barriers found in these areas of the polling sites included doorways or hallways that did not meet the width requirements for wheelchairs, door thresholds that were too high and doorways that did not provide appropriate maneuvering space.
- d. Of the 20% of the surveyed sites where restrooms were available to the public, approximately 40% had one or more violations of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines that would make usage of the restrooms difficult, if not impossible for voters with disabilities.

they would totally preclude access or present extreme hazards or difficulties for voters with disabilities. For instance, the following polling sites were all used in Kern County during the November 2004 election:

- a. Among other ADA violations at the North Heights Baptist Church site, the site had steps that led up to the main and alternative entrances, making it impossible to reach the voting building with a wheelchair in violation of both the ADAAG and the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines;
- b. At the Villa de Oro Rec. Center site, there was no accessible path of travel for pedestrians from the sidewalk to the entrance of the voting site, except through the parking lot which was hazardous and thus not considered accessible. There was no van accessible aisle in the parking lot and none of the disabled parking spaces were closest to the walkway serving the voting site. Further, all the exterior pathways from the parking lot were less than the required 48" width in violation of the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines, and the slope of the pathway from the parking lot was steeper than 5%. Additionally, a ramp constructed over a high threshold at an entrance to the voting area was too narrow and had a sharp edge in violation of the ADA and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines. These conditions would cause voters using a wheelchair to have an extremely difficult time maneuvering on the ramp;
- c. The Victory Chapel site had no spaces in its parking lot marked for persons with disabilities in violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines. Further, the main entrance to the voting area was reachable only by stairs and the ramp at the alternative entrance was only 43" wide in violation of the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines. Additionally, the ramp at the alternative entrance was not equipped with appropriate handrails and curbs, the side entrance door at the top of the ramp had an inaccessible threshold that was approximately 1" high (twice the maximum allowed height) and the restrooms were not accessible for individuals with disabilities in violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines
- d. The Liberty Christian Center site provided a disability parking space near the voting area with inadequate aisle space in violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's

accessibility guidelines which would have been impossible for a passenger to use if the driver had a standard van for wheelchair unloading. Further, the parking space was at the beginning of a path of travel that would lead a voter to a walkway that had no handrails and had an incline of approximately 10%, twice the maximum limit, and the restrooms available to the voters were inaccessible to persons using wheelchairs in violation of the ADAAG and Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines

- 28. In December 2004, Petitioner provided the County of Kern with its results from its survey conducted during the November 2, 2004 election.
- 29. Respondents' failure to comply with the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines and ADA with respect to its selection of polling sites harms those individuals who may use wheelchairs, or walk with the aid of crutches and walkers for whom steep slopes, distant parking, inadequate parking spaces, and stairs constitute complete obstacles to access. Furthermore, even individuals who are not presently disabled may, through accident or illness, become disabled, or at least temporarily so, and face the same types of barriers. These individuals may also find themselves shut out from their polling site because of insurmountable physical barriers or deterred from accessing these sites because of the County's violations of state and federal disabled access laws.
- 30. Respondents' failure to ensure that the County's polling places are accessible to voters with disabilities will cause those individuals irreparable harm.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

PETITION FOR WRIT OF MANDATE (CODE CIV. PROC. § 1085) FOR FAILURE TO PERFORM MINISTERIAL DUTY UNDER THE CALIFORNIA ELECTIONS CODE

(AGAINST ALL DEFENDANTS)

- 31. The People reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 30 of this Petition/Complaint.
- 32. Since at least 1990, Respondents have had a clear, present and ministerial duty to ensure that their polling sites comply with the Secretary of State's accessibility guidelines.
 - 33. The Attorney General, as chief law officer of the State of California has a clear,

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SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

VIOLATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134)

(AGAINST ALL RESPONDENTS/DEFENDANTS)

- 38. The People reallege and incorporate by reference paragraphs 1 through 30 of this Complaint.
- 39. Respondents are public entities and public officials for purposes of Title II of the ADA, United States Code, title 42, section 12131.
- 40. Title II of the ADA provides that "[s]ubject to the provisions of this subpart, no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of a public entity, or shall be subjected to discrimination by any such entity." 42 U.S.C., § 12132. This provision requires the County to ensure that the polling sites it selects provides voters with disabilities with meaningful access to voting sites on election day. Given the fundamental importance of voting in our society, meaningful access under the ADA in the context of voting requires that voters with disabilities have the opportunity to vote at his or her regularly designated polling site on election day, in an integrated setting, along with friends, neighbors and colleagues. Meaningful access under the ADA in the context of voting thus requires elections officials to ensure that voters with disabilities are not confronted with architectural barriers that are expressly prohibited by ADAAG's requirements governing parking, exterior path of travel, and the interior of public and private facilities used as polling sites.
- 41. The requirement that elections officials comply with the ADAAG as to its selection of voting sites is also mandated by the federal regulations promulgated pursuant to the ADA. Those regulations require that when providing a service, a public entity may not "[a]fford a qualified individual with a disability an opportunity to participate in or benefit from the aid, benefit, or service that is not equal to that afforded to others." 28 C.F.R, § 35.130, subd. (b)(1)(ii). Further, when determining the site or location of a facility, a public entity may not make selections:

- "(i) That have the effect of excluding individuals with disabilities from, denying them the benefits of, or otherwise subjecting them to discrimination; or
- "(ii) That have the purpose or effect of defeating or substantially impairing the accomplishment of the objectives of the service, program, or activity with respect to individuals with disabilities." 28 C.F.R., § 35.130 subd. (b)(4).
- 42. During the March 2 and November 2, 2004 statewide elections, the County failed to provide voters with disabilities with meaningful access to its polling sites on election day in violation of the ADA and its implementing regulations. The County's voting program at the polling sites, and/or in its entirety, was not readily accessible to voters with disabilities in compliance with the ADA during the March 2, and November 2, 2004 statewide elections. By failing to ensure that its polling sites comply with the ADAAG, respondents have violated the ADA and the regulations promulgated thereunder, including the United States Code, title 42, section 12132 and the Code of Federal Regulations, title 28, chapter 1, section 35.130.
- 43. In light of Kern County's pattern and practice of non-compliance with the ADA, the People believe that Respondents will continue to fail to ensure that the polling sites it selects are in conformity with the ADAAG and the ADA. Respondents' ongoing violations of the ADA, unless enjoined, will cause irreparable harm to the People of the State of California.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, the People pray for judgment as follows:

- 1. That a preliminary injunction issue enjoining Respondents County of Kern and Ann Barnett, in her Official Capacity as County Clerk and Registrar of Voters of the County of Kern, during the pendency of this litigation from violating Elections Code section 12280 and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act, United States Code, title 42, sections 12131-12134 and its implementing regulations when selecting polling sites in Kern County, including, but not limited to, the violations alleged in this Petition/Complaint;
- 2. That a peremptory writ of mandate issue, under Code of Civil Procedure section 1085, directed to Respondents County of Kern and Ann Barnett, in her Official Capacity as County Clerk and Registrar of Voters of the County of Kern and compelling said Respondents to ensure